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**Sub-theme 38: Comparing Organizations: New approaches to Using Case Study, Small-N, and Set-Theoretical Methods**

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# Dynamic Qualitative Comparative Case-studies in Organization Studies

## 1.0 Introduction

As qualitative case study researchers studying organizations and organizing processes we are often struck by the way texts on case study designs presents the work of designing, conducting and reporting case studies as a systematic, linear step by step process, which structure our research practice and makes the research tasks somewhat predictably. However, and not surprisingly, this is seldom the case in real research life. As Qualitative research is processional in its form, change can and will occur in the research process (Antoft & Kristiansen 2008). No matter how structured and detailed a research protocol you formulate, qualitative research processes are often unpredictable and difficult to control due to the ever changing (organizational) world we intend to study. In our experience qualitative research and especially qualitative case studies should be conceptualized as dynamic research designs since both the empirical data we generate and the research process per se reflect and cause changes which may alter original research questions, research designs and/or the character of our case-studies. This may even be the situation, when our research is evaluated, when presenting the research for the research community etc. (Ragin 1992:8). In other words, we see the use of qualitative case study designs as an inherently dynamic process, which reflects the ever changing nature of reality that calls for research designs, which makes us sensitive to these changes and makes possible adjustments of cases studied, methods and theoretical concepts used, reformulation of our initial research questions and even redefining/-discovering the research problem at hand. As the process of conducting *qualitative* research is characterised by the ambition to be sensitive to the empirical phenomena subject for our scientific inquiry (Brymann 2004:279-281), the data themselves may generate a need for re-considering our research questions or the theories we originally thought would be able to generate hypotheses or interpret the empirical data collected.

When talking about dynamic research designs within social sciences, they are often equated with longitudinal research designs or research designs taking into account temporal processes. Hence dynamic research designs are traditionally concerned with the challenges of comparing empirical phenomena across time, identifying change (de Vaus 2001:114-115, Saldaña 2003) and the challenges of collecting diachronic data (Pettigrew 1990, Czarniawska 2008). Our main argument in this article is that also qualitative research designed for collecting and comparing

synchronic data could be characterised as dynamic. We are not interested in social or organizational change as an empirical phenomenon in itself, but in change as it occurs in the research process and the way in which it affects our ability to conduct scientific valid investigations into organizational life. This calls for a dynamic research design that will make us more sensitive towards the many elements potentially affecting the quality of our scientific endeavours and points at ways to creatively make these the heart of continually reflections on our research designs and their usefulness for the research projects at hand.

The main ambition of the article is to identify and discuss various types of dynamics in qualitative comparative case studies in organization studies and discuss *how*, *when* and *why* these various dynamics originate in the research process. A second ambition is to discuss which challenges these dynamics pose to the validity of the research and give some suggestions to how to accommodate these challenges.

We firstly identify the dynamics which characterise *qualitative comparative case-studies within organisation studies* in general. Secondly, we discuss the challenges the dynamics characterising qualitative comparative case-studies pose to the validity of our research. Various case-designs generate various types of dynamics. In the discussion this is illustrated by differentiating between whether the purpose of the case-design is to generate empirical or theoretical knowledge, and between whether the scientific inquiry is designed on the ground of empirical or theoretical knowledge (Antoft & Salomonsen 2007, forthcoming), i.e. whether they use an inductive or deductive approach.

## **2.0 Dynamics in organizational case-studies**

In the subsequent sections we discuss why dynamics originate in qualitative, comparative case-studies in organization studies. In the discussions we additionally reflect on how and when the various sources of dynamics originate in the research process.

### **2.1 Dynamics in Case-studies**

Dynamics may originate from the fact that the research is contextualised in a case-design as one of the main characteristics of this design is its capacity to embrace the dynamics and complexities in organizations (Lee, Collier & Cullen 2007). These dynamics show themselves when answering the question of what the case is a case of in the various stages of the research process, when researchers are negotiating and constructing the boundaries of the case-study with actors from the empirical

sites subject for our inquiries, when we choose our methods and in the process where we collect our data on the contextual factors of the cases – and go with the dataflow.

### **What are the cases cases of? A simple question – with many possible answers**

Often, what a case study exemplifies will only become apparent *after* the case study has been carried out (Bryman 2004, p.52).

In this article we define case-study as a research design, which take into account the context of the phenomenon subject for our scientific investigation. As the context in organizational studies is often an organisation, we often end up defining and associating our case with specific empirical location as for example a public organization as a ministry or a private company (Bryman 2004, p.49). However, whether conducting case-studies from either an inductive or deductive approach, the question of what the cases we study and compare are cases of, may be answered from both an empirical, specific and a more general, theoretical perspective.

When conducting research from an inductive approach the cases we choose are often chosen on the grounds of an empirical interest and hence with the initial ambition to conduct new empirical knowledge (Antoft & Salomonsen, forthcoming). Having conducted the case-study and retrospective reflecting on the external validity of our research findings inevitably involves reflections which includes general and hence theoretical knowledge. In these processes of reflections our cases not ‘only’ become comparative case-studies of for example identity formation and change in two municipalities, but of processes of organizational identity formations and changes in public organizations in general. Here the dynamic originates when we move from giving an empirical to a more general and theoretical answer to the question of what our cases are cases of.

When designing case-study from a deductive approach the definition of the cases originates from a more general and theoretical universe, as theory not only defines, which contextual aspects of our cases are relevant to include in the empirical investigation, but also which cases to choose in the first place. The former involves a strategic case choice, where theoretical criteria defines whether the cases are chosen because they resemble best, critical, representative, most-similar or most-different (Friendries 1983, Salomonsen & Bureau, forthcoming) cases. Often the ‘true’ character of the cases is revealed as we are well in the process of collecting our data and conducting our initial analysis’. Although we may conduct pilot studies of possible cases in the

theoretically defined relevant population, before we make our final choice, the very nature of case-study, which involves in-dept knowledge of our cases and the contextual factors characterising these, may ‘force’ the researcher to modify the character of the cases or even include new cases. This may be necessary both in terms of ensuring the internal and external validity as we will return to.

In between the deductive, theory-testing and the inductive research designs we find the theory-interpretive case-design. As is the case of inductive research designs the main or initial ambition of this type of research design is to generate new empirical knowledge of specific cases (Antoft & Salomonsen forthcoming). The interpretation of the cases begins, however, not by the specific, empirical but by the general, theoretical level. Often interpretive case-designs include various theoretical perspectives in order to give various interpretations of the cases. Therefore the dynamic is inherent in the process of interpretation itself for the reasons just elaborated when conducting deductive case-studies. There is, however, also another dynamic specific to this type of case-design as the various theories make the phenomenon subject for our inquiries reappear and contextualise the phenomenon in different ways depending on the perspectives involved. Hence, it is inherent in the theory interpretive case-design, which makes use of various types of theories that the answer to the question what the cases are cases of is changing and dynamic.

### **Constructing and Negotiating Case-boundaries with the Inhabitants of Our Cases**

Robert K. Yin argues that the case study is a relevant research strategy, when the boundaries between the phenomenon we study and its context do not appear clear and evident (Yin 1994:13). However, as argued by Barbara Czarniawska, when conducting qualitative case-studies the boundary between a phenomenon and its context is seldom clearly evident (Czarniawska 1997:64), as a central ambition of the research is to find the relevant contextualisation for the phenomenon subject for our inquiries. Therefore we must design and legitimate our case studies in ways, which take into account and enable attention to the meaning of contextual conditions as well as highlight the boundary between a phenomenon and its context. In such a perspective, the creation of the case-boundaries may be conceptualised as a social construction created by the researcher. This construction may or may not initially be informed by theories. Either way the cases are not ‘out there’ to be discovered and delimited as objective phenomenon. Instead our research questions, our approaches, whether inductive or deductive, defines what the cases are cases of, what we initially look for when we begin to collect our data and by doing so, we set the boundaries of our cases. These boundaries may be set as specific periods of time, as a set of aspects of the organizations e.g.

the cultural and institutional aspects, the formal structures which, at least formally, delimit the organizations from their environments etc. The creation of case boundaries as the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context is thus firstly a result of a process or a 'conversation' between the researcher some empirical material, existing theories and often other researchers.

When conducting qualitative case-studies, the process of creating the boundaries and defining the premises of the case-studies may secondly be altered when discussing, negotiating and constructing the cases-boundaries with actors from the empirical sites subject for our inquiries (Czarniawska 1997:65). To further grasp the (practical) process of defining a case-study, Czarniawska (1997) proposes the concept of window-studies, as a description of the starting point of case-studies. The concept points to the idea that case-studies always take their point of departure by 'breaking into' a chain of organizational events, actions, decisions etc, which resemble the processes of the socially constructed, reproduction of the organizational aspects we wish to study. It represents the point in which:

A researcher opens an arbitrary time window and describes all that can be seen through it. Here it is the processes that are negotiated with the actors: what is central, important, new, routine, and so on. A window study can turn into a case study (when the researcher decides to leave the window and follow the train of events), or into a series of mini-cases (Czarniawska 1997:65).

This processional identification of boundaries between phenomena and context is a premise no matter which strategy is applied. In the strategies presented in this article the researcher engages in a conversation with the empirical material in a qualitative manner. Most qualitative oriented researchers have been confronted with informant's unexpected, yet enlightening answers. The informant dismisses the question as being irrelevant for the phenomenon under study, he or she points at several other contextual conditions being overlooked as the case is described by the interviewer or mentions that the context in which we study a certain phenomenon is too narrow, the historical perspective too short etc.

## **Choosing and Negotiating Methods**

Ideally the choice of methods is informed by our research question and the character of the phenomenon subject for our study. In practice this is not the only factor influencing the methods we end up using. As argued by Buchanan & Bryman choice of methods in organizational research is

...a multi-criteria decision that involves a more complex, interrelated, and iterative series of considerations...Choice of method is not a stand-alone decision reached at an early stage in the research process, but evolves as a project unfolds, as the researcher's understanding of the issues and also of the organizational research setting develops. (Buchanan & Bryman 2007:496).

The iterative character of the process of choosing methods is not only caused by the fact that organizations are complex social systems, where the question of what causes what may not be that simple to answer, as many relationships are interdependent (e.g. Gummesson 2007: 229), and their character may change as the researcher gains more insight to the context of the case-study. It is also caused by the fact that organizations are political systems (Buchanan & Bryman 2007:489-492). As a consequence also the choice of methods may be subject for negotiation with the organizational actors. This may for example be the case when negotiating which topics the researcher may investigate, which questions may be asked, to whom and what material which will be accessible for the researchers (Buchanan & Bryman 2007:489-490). Further the choice of methods may be constrained by the way data may be presented in the final research account. For example in her study of political advice in the Danish civil service, Salomonsen (2003) initially wanted to combine qualitative interviews with observation in order to more fully grasp the context of the provision of political advice. In the negotiation of access she was, however, not allowed to observe situations where advice was given to the ministers. Further the field notes collected through observations during her fieldwork in the ministries was not to be cited in the final research report, but was 'merely' allowed to inform the questions she posed to the respondents. But it is not only political. It is also more practical considerations, which may influence the choice of methods. A research process is not only time consuming for the researcher – it may also demand considerable time from the organizational actors when the researcher collects data. Hence the choice of methods may be restricted by the fact that the organization is not willing or able to provide the time needed for, for example extensive qualitative interviews etc.



Summing up the choice of methods is more appropriately to be considered as a dynamic process, which may continue through out the research process. In this process the dynamic character is not only caused by scientific considerations (which we will explore more fully in the subsequent section) and decisions, but also by organizational politics and practical considerations in the organizational settings.

### **Going with the dataflow**

Whether the case-study has an inductive or deductive approach, the collection of data may change and cause a revision of not only the answer to, what our cases are cases of, but also our original research question.

Sometimes the data may speak to us in more direct ways: when our respondents tell us that our conceptualisation of the case is ‘really wrong’, because we miss out the important aspects, because our questions are inadequate, because we put wrong perspectives on the research subject, etc. One might argue that this is not for the respondents to decide – but when conducting research in a qualitative perspective a central point is the ability to be sensitive to the data-material. And some even argue that we have a moral obligation to listen to peoples’ reasoning about their actions and include these in our scientific reflections. This is not because people themselves hold the key to their motives of action, but because they are humans just like ‘us’ (Rorty 1982, Czarniawska 1997:4). But how do we solve this problem? This question may not be easy to answer in any general way, but in general inquiries into the reasons behind the difference in interpretations may be a way to handle the problem. When conducting a comparative case-study of the institutionalisation of political advice in the Danish civil service, Salomonsen (2003) initially conceptualised this process as a process of politicization of the civil service. The civil servants themselves were quite sceptical of this definition and argued that giving political advice should not be equated with a ‘negative’ concept as politicization, but should be conceptualised as a process of professionalization. The example illustrates that sometimes different voices and interpretations become apparent in the collection of data or when analysing the data by the theoretical concepts initially chosen. If recognizing the dynamic character of conducting qualitative case-research these differences or paradoxes are not merely to be solved, by giving priority to our initial theories and conceptualisations (Czarniawska 1997:75). Instead they should be subject for scientific inquiry themselves by preserving the differences and hence the dynamic character of the cases. I.e. instead of either revising the conceptual frame or change it in accordance with the respondents interpretations, we should add another research question – as for example questions like why does

the civil service respond negatively to the concept of politicization? How do they account for their interpretation of the provision of political advice as a professionalization? And what institutions or interest may be reflected in these accounts?

## **2.2 Dynamics in Comparative Case-studies**

The dynamics already presented are often reinforced when the design has a *comparative* character. Although the very process of comparing could be seen as a research strategy which poses a certain logic to how to structure and interpret the empirical data collected (i.e. the identification of similarities and differences Mills et. al. 2006), the mere increase in number of cases almost inevitably makes the empirical data more complex and nuanced which add to the dynamic character of our research designs. There is however also dynamics in comparative case-designs which is caused by the fact that comparison requires qualitatively different considerations in order to ensure the internal validity of the research design. These considerations include the question of what to compare, i.e. considerations regarding population and sampling, as well as how to ensure equivalence.

### **Populations and sampling**

The process where we define which population our cases are valid representing or at the least a part of is the same whether you conduct a single or a comparative case-study. At this stage for the research process, there is greater difference between the processes involved in inductive and deductive research. In the former, the definition of the population is more to be seen as a result of the research process than as a decision made a priori the empirical investigation. As argued by Salomonsen and Bureau, "...considerations to which population the case belongs, are addressed in the course of the analysis and the process of comparing." (Salomonsen & Bureau, forthcoming). Through the iterative process of comparing cases and reducing not only the complexities in the cases, but also identifies what is unique to each case, and what is common across the cases compared, the researcher gets a more general idea of which population the cases could valid be seen as part of. Hence in the inductive approach the researcher begins by sampling the cases to be compared and then in the course of the research process identify and delimit the population to which the cases belong.

In the deductive approach the population is delimited on the grounds of theory as the 'the illusion of random sampling' (Ebbinghaus 2005:135) is replaced by a careful case selection, when doing small N research from such an approach. Hence contrary to the inductive approach the

selection of cases begins by an identification of the population from which the sample for comparison is chosen. Populations may either be given or constructed (Ragin 2006:635). The former may be adequate when the purpose is of a descriptive or explorative character, but when the purpose is explanation a constructed population is preferable.

The construction of a population implies an active role of the researcher and often involves preliminary analysis of the potential cases to be included in the population. According to Ragin (2006) there are two strategies. In one, the population consists of cases which are most relevant to the theories informing the research and the researcher may gradually expand the population of 'best cases' to illustrate, explore or investigate the research question. The other takes a more empirical point of departure and the researcher identifies the relevant population of cases according to an evaluation on whether they are plausible or even 'best' or 'positive' case candidates for the outcome to be investigated. In the former the construction of population is made on the basis of theoretically informed choices on the independent variables whereas in the latter the construction of population is made on the basis of empirically informed choices on the dependent variable.

In terms of dynamics the inductive and deductive approach differ in the sense that in the former the complex and unique character of the cases compared is reduced in the process of investigating the cases, whereas in the latter this complexity is reduced in the strategic choice of what to compare. Both case-studies which take an inductive or deductive approach is however potentially dynamic in the sense that the researcher in the process of comparison may be forced to revise the choice of cases, because, as already mentioned, the cases may turn out to be not comparable as the researcher gains more insight to the cases and their contexts when engaged in the fieldwork (Miles & Huberman 1994:27). And even though the sample of cases in the deductive approach is chosen a priori the empirical part of the research process, it is important in both approaches to be open to potentially revising the initial choice of cases when beginning the comparison from one case to another. As argued by Miles and Huberman it is "...crucial to have understood the dynamics of each particular case before proceeding to cross-case explanations. Without that, superficiality sets in." (1994:207).

These dynamics involved when constructing the population and sampling the cases may be characterised as originating from scientific considerations, which evolves as the researcher becomes more familiar with and collect data from the cases. These dynamics originate thus on the grounds of scientific reflections from the researcher himself or herself. There may, however, also be dynamics involved in the process of sampling, which to a larger extent is beyond the control of the

researcher. . As when the management of (a public) organization in the middle of a comparative case-study decides to end the co-operation because the subject of the study (a reform) suddenly becomes politicized in the media and the political environments (Jørgensen, Forthcoming)

### **Equivalence**

Ensuring equivalence is an essential step when conducting comparative research. That is ensuring that not only the cases, but also the units within the cases, are comparable. Equivalence may both be of a formal and a functional character, and they may differ, both within and across cases, as the formal definition may change when being interpreted by the organizational actors (Salomonsen & Bureau, forthcoming). I.e. a formal definition of a given phenomena, for example the values characterising an organization described in its mission, may differ from the functional definition provided by the organizational actors as they interpret the mission statement. And the functional meaning of the same formal value – for example being an open and responsive organization, may in fact differ quite substantially when comparing across cases. This may of course be considered a conclusion to be reached – i.e. organizations which formally describe themselves in the same vein as being open and responsive are in fact interpreting this value quite differently. But if the cases are sampled as cases, which both formally and functionally are to be characterised as open and responsive organizations, this may require that the researcher reconsiders the choice of the cases being compared. Hence, when the researcher moves beyond the comparison of word and language to the comparison of the interpretations and the socially and culturally embedded meanings of these words, dynamics of qualitative comparison may originate and alter the initial choice of either cases or units being compared.

### **2.3 Dynamics in the Study of Organizations**

Finally, if we define organizations as processes of organizing (Weick, 2006:1732), and accept that “Organizations never actually exist as an identifiable entity...” (Weick 2005:409-410), the very nature of *organizations* could be seen as a dynamic empirical phenomenon, which exists in flux. This poses challenges for the research design, where we must accommodate the changing character of the subject of our inquiries and design our research, which enables us to conceptualize, understand and explain as we go along in constructing and comparing the cases.

Much of the methodological literature on organizing, and how to study it as a phenomenon, focuses on the problem of choosing methods adjustable to changes in organizational

settings (Van de Ven & Huber 1990, Pettigrew 1990, Czarniawska 2008) and less on the construction of research designs sensitive to organizations as a dynamic phenomenon.

However, both the case design and the choice of methods will in one way or the other be influenced by properties of the organization under study such as size, settings (single or multiple settings, whether it is a commercial organization or a professional bureaucracy and be contingent on the stability of the setting or settings. But according to David Buchanan and Alan Bryman one significant contemporary feature of organizations concerns the scale and frequency of changes in organizational roles and structures (Buchanan & Bryman 2007). They describe the difficulties of getting job titles since manager's portfolios of responsibilities often change (Buchanan 2003) and how establishing a list of key informant or constructing an organization chart becomes problematic, all due to the continual changes in organizing.

One of the organizational dynamics we need to cope with in our research is the fact that organizing happens in many places at once, and organizers - organizational actors moving around acting – move around quickly and frequently. The setting for organizing processes can be conceptualized as 'fuzzy settings'. By this we mean that organizing takes place in settings, which can be characterized by the absence of clear organizational boundaries and dimensions. Barbara Czarniawska illustrates this in her studies of managers. She writes:

The only problem is that while the researcher is there, the managers being studied may not be. As I have pointed out in other contexts (Czarniawska 2004, 2007) modern management occurs in a net of fragmented, multiple contexts, through multitudes of kaleidoscopic movements (Czarniawska 2008:6)

In especially rapidly changing organizational settings, our case-designs must be regularly adjusted according to the present in a flexible manner, as the initial design seems inadequate to capturing the organizational phenomenon under study or follow new ideas, traces or problems, when they become apparent in the case material. But when defining organizations as processes of organizing and as a consequence see organizations as existing in flux with no clear boundaries, we must constantly reconsider what our cases are cases of.

The dynamics involved in studying organizing is not only caused by the fact that organizations have fuzzy settings and fuzzy boundaries (Cheney & Christensen 2004:525). As argued by David Silverman it is also caused by the fact that most qualitative research takes it point

of departure in a social constructive perspective, where it becomes meaningless to engage in revealing the reality as it really is (Silverman 1993:201-203) as the essential reality always *escapes* (Silverman 1993:203). What we can do is to recognize that the phenomenon we study is *reappearing* by organizational actors, when they construct their social reality. This means that the fuzziness of organizational boundaries is not only caused by the fact that organizations may be difficult to formally delimit on an organizational chart, but also because the relation between the organization and its environments is constantly enacted (Weick 1995).

Whereas the re-conceptualization of organizations as organizing has consequences for both the internal and external validity of our research, the recognition of the potential dynamic (or stability) characterising the way the phenomenon we study reappears in the various context included in our research design and reflected in our data is primarily a concern for the construct and internal validity. This we return to in the subsequent section.

### **3.0 Validity in Dynamic Research**

In this article we argue that dynamics is an inherent part when conducting research within a qualitative comparative case-design. This poses specific challenges to the validity of our research. We argue, however, that recognizing the dynamics enable the researcher to better face these challenges, which reinforces the validity of the conclusions drawn from our research. This argument is elaborated firstly by a discussion of how recognition of the dynamics may contribute to more valid research from a traditional perspective on validity. One could however also argue that taking a dynamic perspective seriously may require a revision of the traditional perspectives on validity. We therefore secondly discuss how a dynamic perspective on qualitative, comparative case-design supports conceptualisations of validity, where internal validity is conceptualised as credibility and where external validity is conceptualised as transferability.

Traditional conceptualizations of validity differentiate between construct, internal and external validity (Salomonsen & Bureau, forthcoming). In what follows we discuss the challenges of ensuring especially construct and internal validity in dynamic case-studies. Construct validity relates to the question of whether the data we choose to collect as indications of a given concept are in fact reflecting the concept we wish to study (Bryman 2004:28). The logic when ensuring this validity is quite different from whether one conducts research from a deductive or an inductive process. The former is based on the theory chosen for the research a priori collecting the data. The latter takes its point of departure in the empirical data, and continues being an issue to be considered

through out the research process as the researcher by iterative processes between data and theoretical reflections constantly reflects on how to conceptualise the data collected (Salomonsen & Bureau, forthcoming). On the surface this constantly enables an inductive approach to take into account the premise of the dynamic nature of conducting qualitative, comparative case studies in organizations. Furthermore it makes the process more flexible compared to the deductive approach, as a revision of the choice of theory in the deductive approach makes a new operationalization necessary and thus a new process of ensuring construct validity.

Central to the process of ensuring construct validity in dynamic research designs is not only to note when, why and how the researcher adds or changes the initial repertoire of concepts and/or definitions of concepts and hence includes new data and/or new perspectives on the data collected. It is of equal importance that the researcher returns ' to the data already collected and re-analyse and re-interpret these in the light of these revisions. Do the new perspectives and concepts shed new light on the data already collected (in the deductive approach)? Does new data contextualise the data already collected in novel ways (in the inductive approach)? These processes have been conceptualised as the rule of inclusion (Dahler-Larsen 2007:326-328), and both may force a re-coding of the data already collected.

The matter of the question regarding internal validity is whether the researcher draws valid conclusions when analysing the data. Hence the research design is of great importance for internal validity. It has been argued that internal validity is primarily to be considered in explanatory research, when the researcher draws conclusions regarding causal relationships (Bryman 2004:28). We argue, however, that it is as important for descriptive, interpretive and explorative research as well, although recognizing that in these types of research the internal validity comes close to construct validity. In comparative case-design a typical challenge is facing the researcher as he or she becomes more familiar with the cases chosen. Do the cases in fact represent most similar or most different cases (in the deductive approach)? Do the cases exhibit differences, which is enables theorising (in the inductive approach)?

If the answer is no, the researcher has two apparent choices: either to revise the initial research questions, expectations or ambitions in terms of testing, constructing or exploring theoretical models and hypotheses or to revise the initial choice of cases. Again this may be not only quite time consuming, but also, if one chooses to 'leave a case behind', challenging in terms of explaining to an organization, after having spent time on negotiating access and boundaries and

having taken time from the organization that it ‘doesn’t quite fit after all’. One way to accommodate this dynamic is to gradually choose the cases to be compared.

However, there might also be a third possible choice if the case turns out to be more different than expected by in fact being an outlier as either a *negative or disconfirming* or *exceptional or discrepant* (Miles & Huberman 1994:34). As argued by Miles and Huberman “...*the outlier is your friend.*” (1994:269). By keeping the cases which either allows the identifications of the limits of ones conclusion or enables the (dynamic) revision of the initial expectations, findings or conclusions, one is able to strengthen either the external or the internal validity of the research.

The traditional concepts of validity discussed above are, however, not the only criteria by which the scientific community ensure and discuss the validity of research. As alternative conceptualizations of validity the criterion of credibility has been suggested (Schatzman & Strauss 1973:134, Lincoln & Guba 1985, Bryman 2004:274-275).

The criterion of credibility recognizes the social constructive character of both the empirical world subject for our inquiries as well as of the research process itself. If our knowledge of the world is more to be understood as various accounts of a (contingent) socially constructed reality than as reflections of the world as it really is, the starting point for evaluating the knowledge produced becomes a question of whether it is judged as plausible (Weick 1989). I.e. whether our account is acceptable to the audience to which we present our research. This criterion not only recognises the dynamics involved in both producing and presenting our research. It additionally puts emphasis on the rule of transparency (Dahler-Larsen 2007:328), which highlights the importance of making the data collection, and equally important the way we analyse our data transparent for both laymen and our research colleagues.

#### **4.0 Concluding remarks**

In the introduction to this paper we argued, that not just qualitative comparative case studies but qualitative research, whether inductive or deductive, at some point become an iterative process where the researcher is constructing and reflecting on the cases, their boundaries, and content in the context of theory and empirical data and of his or hers (initial) research questions or ambitions and the actors from the field’ interests, ideas and conceptualizations of the case involved. Thus, qualitative research is always a processional and since change in some form will occur in the research process dynamics are to be regarded as a premise when conducting qualitative case-studies. Thus our main argument is that we as researchers must be sensitive to the dynamics in



qualitative case studies since they can have implications for not just the way we think about our research and how we conduct it, but also for our representations of findings and the validity of our scientific inquiries. We have described a number of these dynamics and we have given examples of how to accommodate some of these dynamics in terms of ensuring validity.

This being said, the discussion in this paper raises yet another interesting question with no simple answer: when do the dynamics end? Or put in a different way how, when and why do we shortcut the dynamics, enabling data collection, analytic work on the organizational phenomenon under study and creating scientific representations to the audiences? As for now we will point at four different reasons:

First, there are practical reasons. Empirical organization studies are often conducted with limited resources, which mean that the case study is forced into a certain timeframe and as a consequence the possibility of alternations of original research questions, research designs and changes in choice of methods and theories is limited. In the same vein, if we apply the rule of inclusion, as discussed earlier, there are (practical) limits to how often the researcher can choose to either introduce new concepts or collect more data, as both choices forces the researcher to potentially revise the initial analysis of the data already collected.

Secondly, if we follow the premise, that organizations should be conceptualized as organizing processes, the stability in the patterns of organizing under study can prove to represent an end for this particular dynamic. In a case study conducted by Rasmus Antoft (2005) he studied interprofessional relations and how health-professionals organized work across professional and organizational boundaries. After three years of fieldwork a stable pattern of interaction between the professionals appeared from the data collected, and it was conceptualized as *negotiation processes*. At one hand this conceptualization, so to speak, embodied the dynamic and enabled conclusions concerning the research questions, but on the other hand it does not try to escape the dynamic of organizing, as the ongoing negotiations between the health-professionals had a processional character: the phenomenon – the negotiation processes – were reappearing as the professionals constructed the reality in this fuzzy setting on an everyday basis. At the same time the stability in patterns of organizing does not mean that other dynamics disappear. In this study new qualitative methods were applied as new ideas, problems and research questions appeared in the research process and the case design was adjusted according to changes in the formal organization of the interprofessional relations in question.

Thirdly, the choice of theory creates boundaries for our cases and it defines the dimensions in the organizational setting interesting to the study. In this way, theories help us dealing with the fuzzy character of the organizational setting in the case construction. Being sensitive to the dynamics involved when collecting and analysing data and (re) considering our choice of theory must not turn in to a process where we either ‘throw away’ or even falsify theories ‘just because they do not really fit’ – perfectly that is – our empirical data – because as we all knows – they seldom do. Neither must it turn in to a process where we hold on to our initial choice of theories and hypotheses, but change our cases until we find the cases which verifies our expectations. In both cases, we may end up missing chances for not only testing, but also further develop theories. And in both cases, we may end up being guilty of one of the misunderstandings about case-study research (Flyvbjerg 2004:421) – the bias toward verification.

Finally, the sensitivity to the dynamics inherent in case designs might have negative consequences for organizational analysis. Through out this paper we have argued for the necessity of alertness to the dynamics in qualitative case designs, because in the end they have implications for the validity of our organization studies. However, there is an implicit danger in this way of thinking. Too much attention to the dynamics might blind the researcher, and the risk of the phenomenon under study escaping becomes possible. This is not because the essential reality always escapes, but because the researcher gets caught in a net of dynamics in need for disclosure and reflections and misses the initial purpose of the research: to study organizational phenomena with an attention to the implications of the dynamics unfolding in the research process.

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